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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 08 COLOMBO 000769

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS  
MCC FOR S GROFF, D TETER, D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: EU HUMANITARIAN AID REPORT ON  
LTTE-CONTROLLED VANNI PORTRAYS RESIDENTS "CRYING INSIDE"

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Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The EU Delegation to Sri Lanka, passed to us on May 28 a confidential report describing a recent European Commission Humanitarian Assistance (ECHO) visit to Sri Lanka's Vanni region, the heart of the northern area controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The report is notable for the details it provides on social and political circumstances in the Vanni. The following are some of the report's key points:

- People in the Vanni are in a desperate state;
- they are not allowed by the LTTE to leave the area and only receive limited support due to the restricted access imposed by the Government of Sri Lanka;
- situation is aggravated by the major recruitment drive of the LTTE and by the ongoing SLA air strikes;
- total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Vanni equals 24% of the population;
- adequate support to these IDPs is lacking; this is probably why the LTTE is limiting the number of IDP camps and instead demanding that IDPs stay with friends, relatives and other host families;
- livelihood situation is a major humanitarian concern because the area is virtually closed, farmers, traders and fishermen do not have a market to sell their products;
- according to one resident: "All people here are crying inside, because we are being attacked from two sides." End summary.

¶2. (C) Following is a transcript the full report, excluding some tables, and with footnotes merged into the text as parenthetical notes.

BEGIN TEXT

Mission Report ECHO, 28 May 2007

Introduction  
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This is a report on the mission conducted by ECHO to the Vanni, which took place from 23 to 25 May 2007 (see itinerary annexed). The mission was conducted with a colleague from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) as a Bilateral Donor Group (BDG) humanitarian field assessment to the Vanni, which was a follow up to similar field visits to the other areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka. The mission will report its findings to the wider BDG, to the GoSL through the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (CCHA), and if necessary to other parties and stakeholders.

#### General situation

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The 'Vanni' is an area in the north of Sri Lanka which is under the control of the LTTE and contains the district Kilinochchi, Mullativu, part of Vavuniya (Vavuniya North), part of Mannar (Manthai West) and part of Jaffna (Vadamarachchi East). The Vanni is bound by the Forward Defence Lines (FDL); to the North (towards Jaffna) by the Muhamalai FDL and to the South (towards Vavuniya) by the Omanthai FDL. To the West there is a FDL crossing at Uyilankulam in Mannar. These three FDLs restrict all movement in and out the Vanni, especially since August 2006 when hostilities started again.

There are parallel setups of LTTE administration to each Government's departments in the Vanni. The LTTE administration is the de facto power holder. Government Police and Legal systems do not function in the Vanni. LTTE implemented their own police force (see picture) and own legal system, including Tamil Eelam Courts and Tamil Eelam laws. Vanni is characterized by inadequate infrastructure facilities (road, electricity, water supply, communication), essential services (medical, banking, education and livelihood) and a lack of employment opportunities.

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The attached population statistics (see table) are available from the Government Agents' offices in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi (the accuracy of the GA's statistics is not clear as there has been no census or survey in the Vanni for many years). Adding to this part of the population from the other districts brings the total estimate of the population in the Vanni to 400,000 people, which is roughly 2% of the total population of Sri Lanka (estimated at 20 million people).

Ethnic Groups District	Kilinochchi District		Mullaitivu	
	Families	Persons	Families	Persons
Tamil	35,000	141,930	36,633	152,724
Moor	116	423	43	237
Singhalese	7	10	0	0
Others	0	0	5	29
Total	35,811	142,363	36,681	152,290

One of the major findings of the mission was the desperate state of the people in the Vanni; they are locked up in a huge confined and isolated area; not allowed by the LTTE to leave the area and only receiving limited support due to the restricted access imposed by the GoSL. Their situation is aggravated by the major recruitment drive of the LTTE (not only forcing young people into the LTTE but also forcing another major part of the population into voluntary "home guard" service) and the ongoing SLA air strikes (although quite accurate still very disturbing) and their imminent attack. (As one beneficiary put it: "All people here are crying inside, because we are being attacked from two sides.")

#### Access

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Since the re-start of the conflict in August 2006, the GoSL has slowly but surely imposed restricted access to the Vanni. While the northern FDL in Jaffna at Muhamalai is completely

closed due to ongoing fighting, the two remaining crossing points Omanthai (Vavuniya) and Uyilankulam (Mannar) apply a very restricted and limited access for humanitarian supplies and staff. The restrictions on fuel (only a limited quota is given by the Commissioner General of Essential Services (CGES) per agency, which is then often halved or diminished by the Ministry of Defence), cement and iron bars are jeopardising the ongoing humanitarian activities the most. As a result the prices have risen exponentially (see table next page) and will continue to rise the longer the current access restrictions remain. Strangely enough all items remain available in the Vanni, albeit for a much higher cost, which has made various actors suggest that elements in both parties military make a profit of smuggling.

Items	Price South (Rs.)	Price Vanni (Rs.)
Cement	500/bag	2850/bag
Petrol	106/ltr	450/ltr
Diesel	96/ltr	190/ltr

The mission experienced themselves a taste of the access restrictions imposed on humanitarian staff. The Bilateral Donor Group (BDG) has been requesting for a Vanni mission since January 2007 and was only given approval at the Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) on 23 April 2007. The BDG mission started with 5 participants but because only technical humanitarian staff was approved (also one member was hindered because of illness) the mission left for the Vanni with 3 participants. Even though the note verbales were sent and approval was given at Colombo level, the local commanders were not informed which forced the team to wait in Anuradapura. A day later on the 24th of May 2007 the entry was attempted with the support of the ICRC and UN. Because the local commander was still not informed by Colombo, it took 3 hours of waiting and making phone calls to finally receive approval. Unfortunately MoD Colombo had sent the old list of 5 participants to the checkpoint, making the local commander reject the entry of the Canadian

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representative of the mission. In addition, the border army guards do not practise proper diplomatic border crossing procedures and made the mission subject to extensive baggage control and body searches.

These delays in approvals, the miscommunication between the officials at Colombo and Omanthai, the ad hoc rejections and the time consuming entry (2 to 3 hours) are according to the implementing agencies symptomatic for the restricted access imposed on all humanitarian transport.

Just before the mission, various security incidents happened which forced ICRC (ICRC facilitation role at the Forward Defense Line (FDL) is set up to assist civilian and humanitarian crossings, and the parties do not allow anyone through without ICRC's presence to withdraw from the lines and propose a more limited presence (3 hours a day for 5 days a week). Although discussions on this proposal are ongoing, it is very likely that access will be more time-limited as a result of the ongoing insecurity incidents at the lines. (ICRC mentioned that 7 security incidents had occurred at the lines this year, the last one the shooting by LTTE border guards of people fleeing the Vanni to escape forced recruitment.)

#### Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Vanni has a history of internal displacement as well as hosting large numbers of IDPs from Jaffna and other districts. The biggest influx of IDPs into Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu (mostly Jaffna) occurred in the later part of 1995 and early 1999. As a result of attacks on the Vanni and the oppression and forced recruitment by the LTTE, internal displacement in the Vanni has seen people flee within the

district but also out of the districts. Many individuals and families, inhabitants of the Vanni, have been displaced more than five times since 1987. The majority of them returned after the CFA of which most integrated locally and others remain in displacement, especially those that came from the "high security zones" in Jaffna.

As a result the UNHCR reports three groups of IDPs in the Vanni:

-- Some of the IDPs are "old" IDPs - i.e. IDPs who have been displaced since the conflict of the 1990s and still have not been able to return to their places of origin due to protection concerns, lack of services, infrastructure, or access to property.

-- Other IDPs are tsunami IDPs - i.e. IDPs who were displaced by the tsunami in 2004. This group of IDPs has decreased compared to 2005 as the relief community worked with the displaced to provide durable solutions. However, with the ban on cement and other essential construction materials since August 2006, most of the tsunami reconstruction projects have come to a standstill.

-- Finally, there are the "new" IDPs. These are the IDPs that have been displaced since December 2005 and onwards, as the security situation became volatile. The first wave of new IDPs arrived to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu District in December 2005 - February 2006 primarily from Jaffna. The second wave of new IDPs came in April and May 2006, again mostly from Jaffna but also some from other areas. The third wave of displacement happened on August 11 2006, where the outbreak of hostilities between SLA and LTTE made many people flee from their homes due to shelling. These IDPs are from within Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu District.

The total number of IDPs in the Vanni, encompassing these 3 groups of IDPs, is currently an approximate 94,000 people (48,000 Kilinochchi, 30,000 Mullaitivu, 14,000 Mannar and 2,000 Vavuniya districts) (Source: UNOCHA maps of internal displacement) which is 24% of the population. Against the backdrop of limited services, supplies and resources, the

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mission found that adequate support to these IDPs is lacking. It's probably for this reason that the LTTE is limiting the number of IDP camps and instead demanding IDPs to stay with friends, relatives and other host families (82% of the IDPs is staying with host families). In this way the burden of assisting the IDPs is shared among the already depleted resources of the wider host communities living in the Vanni.

The IDPs that are not with host families are currently staying at 18 IDP camps (which is locally called IDP villages because of the LTTE's rejecting of IDP camps), roughly containing 4,300 families or 17,000 people (Hence 18% is not staying in host families but at the IDP villages). One of the IDP sites, namely Arasapuram located at Poonegary (also called Pooneryn) DS, was visited by the mission team. The team found the following situation: Arasapuram was sparsely populated before August 2006, and hence few facilities were available. Since August 2006, approximately 2,300 IDP families are living in the area. The IDPs are mostly fishermen and farmers, who fled from the coastal areas of Poonegary and Palai Divisions which were under shelling attack since August 11 2006. Assistance is provided by UNHCR (dispensary, shelter and coordination), Oxfam (shelter and watsan), DRC (access roads), UNICEF (medical kits) and the GA office (bawsering water). Despite limited resources the implementing agencies and local authorities try to do their best to assist the displaced with adequate services and supplies. One of the examples of their pro-active approach is the development of an emergency preparedness plan. Namely, the GA office informed us of an advanced plan where 25 IDP sites have been proposed in the 4 AGA divisions in preparation of an expected 100,000 new displaced (20,000 IDP

families), in case heavy fighting breaks out in the Vanni.

The mission found the following humanitarian needs with the IDP population, as well as with the wider community.

#### Food Security and livelihood

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The livelihood situation is a major humanitarian concern at the moment. Because the area is virtually closed, farmers, traders and fishermen do not have a market to sell their products. This is most clearly indicated by the huge red rice surplus. Normally the red rice harvested in the Vanni is for a large part sold in Jaffna and Vuvuniya, but because of the closure of the lines only limited amounts have been transported out of the Vanni. As a result the price for rice in the Vanni is: 22 Rs/kg against 38 Rs/kg in Colombo/Vavuniya and 200 Rs/kg in Jaffna. Although this has kept the short term food situation under relative security, the long term livelihood situation is worsening because of the prolonged access restrictions on the lines. This also relates to the restrictions on transport of construction materials, which has put most construction activities and daily labour employment opportunities on a hold.

#### Health

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Because of the constant threats to the population from both parties to the conflict, the major health problems found were psycho-social. ICRC reported that they receive at their hospital in Mulativu 2 or 3 attempted suicide cases daily and since August 2006, they have registered 200 psychiatric cases.

The medical situation is aggravated by a lack of medical supplies and fuel. For example it took ICRC 7 months to get their medical emergency supplies into the Vanni (they currently 'only' have 3 kits which are set up to treat each around 100 war wounded). The lack of fuel has severely hampered the continued operations of mobile clinics and the cold chain for the vaccination programmes. As a result even the government services have to resort to purchasing fuel at high prices locally in order to keep the hospital generators and the water pumps for the bowzers running.

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#### Protection

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The mission has found that the protection sector is the sector with the biggest humanitarian concerns. As described above the mission feels that both parties to the conflict share responsibility on this negative trend, the LTTE with forcing almost all civilians into their military ranks and support services and the SLA with restricting humanitarian access and continuing with its aerial attacks and bombings.

The issue of forced recruitment has grown into extreme proportions with the LTTE having recruited 1 family member of 99% (This percentage, as well as a total recruited force of 30,000 cadres, has been given by the LTTE to local actors. Based on the policy of 1 family member of each family and the fact that roughly 100,000 families reside in the Vanni, the actual size of the LTTE is estimated by various actors to be higher than the reported 30,000.) of the families living in the Vanni. Their recruitment drive has now also come to the NGO, UN and ICRC national staff members (Although UN and ICRC have so far only had 1 or 2 stand alone cases of forced recruitment, it was reported that more pressure is also put on their local staff.), with a reported 10% (roughly 600 national staff members with 50 to 60 being recruited) of the NGO national staff being recruited! The percentage of local staff recruited from the local NGOs is even estimated to be much higher, namely 25%. In addition to recruiting full time

cadres, LTTE is also recruiting home guards who receive military training and a rifle (sometimes also a basic uniform as the person on the picture) and are ordered to work around 3 days/week (e.g. these "home guards" were found all along the A9 where they are supposed to protect people from claymore mines and the SLA's deep penetration units). It has been reported that the LTTE is further forcing civilians into military support services, requiring from them to give 1 week every 2 months to perform labour jobs like clearing roads, building bunkers, erecting fences, etc.

Although NGOs, UN and ICRC have brought up these issues with the LTTE political wing, the LTTE has so far not changed its recruitment and mobilisation drive. Although UNICEF indicated that they receive fewer reports of under age recruitment, this is counter balanced with the increased forced recruitment of older youth (even beyond 30 years of age) (At the same time these reduced reports could also be caused by an increased atmosphere of intimidation, reducing the number of families that report to UNICEF because of fear of reprisals). From a humanitarian perspective the recruitment of humanitarian staff is of major concern. Not only does it jeopardise the ongoing humanitarian activities, it also undermines the impartiality of the humanitarian actors in the eyes of the government. The only answer the agencies have against this recruitment drive is the presence of international staff members, whom can provide protection for their national colleagues. At the moment the number of international staff in the Vanni is reported to be around 30 people.

While this forced recruitment and mobilisation is ongoing, the LTTE is restricting people to leave the area. Although children below 10 and elderly above 80 can easily cross, others might only get a travel pass if they have already provided 1 or sometimes 2 family member(s) to the LTTE. As a result of these restrictions and the continued fighting along the FDLs, ICRC reported a huge reduction in civilians crossing the lines. In April 2006 ICRC reported 200,000 crossings at Omanthai, this year in April only 15,000 people crossed, which is a reduction of 93%!

Another protection concern is the continuation of SLA air strikes, which was reported to take place every other day. Although the air strikes are relatively accurate (only 3 civilian casualties over the last months were reported) the threat and noise are very disturbing for the population. People are running away for protection (schooling has been

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severely hampered because children run away terrified after every air strike) and hiding wherever they can (almost every house has a bomb shelter or trench).

#### Humanitarian Coordination

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The humanitarian actors complained about the difficulties faced to coordinate all activities with two structures, the LTTE's Planning and Development Secretariat (PDS) as well as the GoSL's GA structure. This was for example experienced when sites had to be selected for the new influx of IDPs where a difference of opinion between the PDS and the GA offices resulted in major delays. At the end of the day it is the PDS which implements the LTTE's decisions on humanitarian issues and the GA structure follows. Unfortunately at the moment most LTTE officers, including most PDS officials are busy with military matters, thus limiting the implementing and decision making capacity on humanitarian issues.

#### Humanitarian Issues discussed with LTTE/PDS

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The mission took up the following issues in their discussion with the PDS of the LTTE (Mr Thilak, the Secretary General of the PDS and Mr Maran, the PDS Director for Kilinochchi were

present at the meeting):

-- Guiding Principles (GP, see Annex) were shown to the PDS officials but a copy was not handed over. The mission indicated that once the GP was officially launched a copy would be sent through SLMM and the PDS email account (thilakpds@gmail.com).

-- Support the independence of humanitarian agencies (currently the GoSL and the local NGO council have issued a new regulation demanding INGOs to work through Local NGOs, limiting the possibility for them to work directly. (Because the TRO is controlling the local NGO council and has its representatives at the local NGOs, INGOs fear that working through the local NGOs could compromise the independence on target group selection and implementation.)

o The LTTE/PDS responded and said that during the Tsunami response international agencies were allowed to work directly because the scale of the work and the required timeliness was too much for the local NGOs to cope with. Now that relative normalcy has returned INGOs should work through the local NGOs so as to assure sustainability and capacity building in the humanitarian aid delivery. In case any INGO has problems with a local NGO they can talk to us and we solve the issues together.

-- Prevent any misuse of humanitarian aid supplies and equipment (e.g. reports on the misuse of vehicles and the disappearances of mine clearance equipment).

o The LTTE/PDS responded by saying that they have zero tolerance for misuse of aid. There could have been one or two cases of 'raw elements' that might have misused our rule, but as an organisation we are very strict on applying this rule at all the levels.

-- Improve humanitarian protection of civilians by reversing the climate of manipulation and oppression (e.g. increased recruitment drive and prevention of private trading in Jaffna).

o LTTE/PDS responded by saying that they have no control over what happens in Jaffna; any military party could prevent the people from trading in Jaffna. In regards to forcibly recruiting civilians, the LTTE/PDS has the line that it should not be called recruitment but rather conscription, as many countries apply. The LTTE is against under age recruitment and does not allow any one in their military who is born before 1990.

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-- Improve humanitarian protection by providing safe havens (e.g. Madhu Church) and refrain from using civilians as human shields (e.g. Vaharai with military installations close to population).

o LTTE/PDS responded that they fully support this approach and had even set up a safe haven at the Kilinochchi hospital. Unfortunately the SLA has targeted it and almost killed its patients.

-- Follow humanitarian international standards and adhere to the Geneva call and destroy all mines.

o LTTE/PDS: we are ready to respond to this call but feel that the state actor should first answer, we will then immediately follow.

-- Facilitate humanitarian convoys (e.g. ship to Jaffna) and provide security guarantees.

o LTTE/PDS: the support to a transport ship has been discussed with the UN and ICRC, we do not decide on these issues. If you want we can bring it up with the Head of the

Political Wing.

-- Assist facilitation of transport of humanitarian staff and goods (e.g. no taxes can be levied)

o LTTE/PDS: Since the Tsunami no taxes have been levied in our controlled areas.

-- Cease the forced recruitment of humanitarian aid workers and facilitate their immediate release (e.g. reports received indicate that roughly 10% of local NGO staff is being recruited). Meeting was promised with NGOs and UN on this issue.

o LTTE/PDS: we do not recruit people from humanitarian agencies, the decision to select one family member for conscription lies with the families.

-- PDS should take up a stronger role of coordination, especially on the new IDPs influx.

o LTTE/PDS: this is exactly what we have done over the past months. We have improved the performance of the local NGOs and we have started monthly coordination meetings.

#### Recommendations

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Based on this visit, as well as previous visits to other areas, the BDG would like to make the following recommendations:

The overall recommendations for implementing humanitarian agencies, the international donor and diplomatic community, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are:

-- Respect, uphold and promote International Humanitarian Law by keeping civilians out of military activities and conflict hence ensuring their protection and security

-- Allow free movement of civilians and unfettered humanitarian access to all areas of Sri Lanka

-- Continually assess, monitor and evaluate the humanitarian situation in all areas and implement appropriate and timely humanitarian responses based on the adopted Guiding Principles for Sri Lanka

-- Improve civil-military relations and humanitarian coordination through interaction and dialogue at all levels, driven by GoSL, LTTE, other protagonists, civil-society, community leaders, implementing agencies and donors

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To the Government of Sri Lanka:

-- Allow humanitarian agencies and their donors to assess and monitor the activities

-- Reverse the media's demonisation of the implementing agencies by issuing supportive statements praising their activities and contributions

-- Implement and promote the Guiding Principles in order to improve the humanitarian space and the safety/security of humanitarian workers

--Protect civilians and keep them away from military activities and conflict

To the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam:

--Cease the forced recruitment of civilians (of any age), and facilitate the immediate release of humanitarian aid workers



--Prevent civilians from being dragged into the conflict and reverse the climate of manipulation and oppression of civilians

-- Allow humanitarian convoys and provide security guarantees, e.g. for humanitarian ship transports to Jaffna

-- Prevent any misuse of humanitarian aid supplies and equipment

END TEXT

BLAKE